

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 974

By Powell

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of George Edward Barrett of Nashville.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of George Edward Barrett, a renowned civil rights attorney who clearly demonstrated his passion for justice, by both word and deed, throughout his extraordinary career; and

WHEREAS, popularly known as “The Citizen” and “Citizen Barrett” for his conviction that the role of citizen is democracy’s highest calling, Mr. Barrett was a champion for social justice who consistently defended the rights of the poor and marginalized; and

WHEREAS, a Nashville native, George Barrett grew up in East Nashville and attended Catholic schools as a youth. He graduated from Spring Hill College, a Jesuit school, in 1952, and completed graduate studies at Oxford University in England in 1953; and

WHEREAS, upon obtaining his Juris Doctor degree from Vanderbilt University Law School in 1957, Mr. Barrett began his legal career in the office of Cecil Branstetter, one of the South’s leading labor lawyers, and he later became a founding partner of the law firm Barrett Johnston Martin & Garrison, LLC; and

WHEREAS, during the Civil Rights Era, George Barrett vigorously defended the predominantly African-American college students protesting the segregation of downtown Nashville lunch counters in the early 1960s; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Barrett’s most famous case was undoubtedly *Geier v. University of Tennessee*, an all-encompassing lawsuit confronting institutionalized segregation in higher education in Tennessee; originally filed in 1968, the suit took more than thirty-five years and the terms of six governors to successfully resolve; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Barrett tried to always make himself available to represent voters who were turned away at the polls on Election Day and was a fierce advocate for the right of all citizens to cast a ballot; and

WHEREAS, an attorney who “loved the good fight,” George Barrett was an ardent Democrat who was a close ally of Nashville mayor and congressman Richard Fulton, and a lifelong confidant of legendary Tennessee journalist John Seigenthaler; and

WHEREAS, Mayor Karl Dean called Mr. Barrett “larger than life and always willing to take up an unpopular cause if he felt it was the right thing to do,” while State Comptroller Justin Wilson noted that George Barrett “always played fair and was a worthy opponent. He always kept his word”; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Barrett is survived by his daughters, Ann Louise Barrett Thomason, Mary Eloise Barrett Brewer, and Kathryn Conroy Barrett Cain; his sister, Mary George Barrett O.P., a Dominican nun; and eleven grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, men of George Barrett’s integrity and compassion do not often walk among us, and it is thus fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional public servant and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we celebrate the life and honor the memory of George Edward Barrett, reflecting fondly upon his lifelong commitment to justice for all people and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Mr. Barrett.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.